

I SNUCK IN

How the honorary Aussie took the US Open **SPORT**



GOURMET TO GO

Food from the freezer

PLUS Matthew Evans dishes Doyles **GOOD LIVING**



'We no longer have parliamentary government in any meaningful sense of the term'

Senate boss blasts PM's monarchy

A HERALD INVESTIGATION

Gerard Ryle, Lisa Pryor and Mark Metherell

The Australian Parliament has deteriorated into a form of elective monarchy where the Prime Minister "rules all he surveys", says the most senior public servant in the Senate, Harry Evans.

In remarkably frank reaction to *Herald* revelations that parliamentary inquiries are being ignored by the Government, Mr Evans, the Clerk of the Senate, says it is time the public insists on better representation.

Writing in the *Herald* today, he argues: "We no longer have parliamentary government in any meaningful sense of the term."

On radio yesterday, Mr Evans likened John Howard to a king and said people needed to be more sophisticated about what they expected from their elected representatives. "There is in Australia an enormous concentration of power in the Prime Minister," he told 2UE. "People don't realise this, that we really have a sort of elective monarchy where, you know, you elect the monarch and ... [he] rules all he surveys."

While voters solidly support the Howard Government and gave it a clear majority in both houses of Parliament, Mr Evans argues that this does not give the Prime Minister the right to dictate how his MPs should vote on every issue.

Calling Parliament the weak link, he writes that Government MPs should not support it on "every note" and urges voters to demand their "elected representatives actually represent them, and not settle for choosing between autocrats every three years."

Mr Evans has a reputation for being impartial but also a fierce defender of parliamentary process. He has been tough on Coalition and Labor governments.

Yesterday the *Herald* revealed that millions of taxpayers' dollars had been wasted on more

DEMOCRACY DENIED

Giving a monopoly of power to one party is ... a sure route to corruption and misuse.

HARRY EVANS
Clerk of the Senate
Comment - Page 11



NO LIGHTS, NO ACTION

When Parliament summoned Merrilea Broad to Canberra, she had exhausted all other ways of trying to ensure her daughter, whose car was hit by a freight train, had not died in vain. She told MPs at an inquiry into level crossing crashes: "This is very simple. Three state coroners have ... come up with the same thing: it would be nice to have lights on trains." The inquiry called for action, but the result? "Absolutely zip," Mrs Broad says. - Page 7

than 70 parliamentary inquiries whose recommendations had been left to collect dust. Forty-six of these were Senate inquiries, some dating back to 1997.

The Government Senate leader, Robert Hill, defended its record by saying many of the upper house inquiries were designed to embarrass the Government. "In relation to proper bipartisan reports, they



"We really have a sort of elective monarchy" ... the Clerk of the Senate, Harry Evans, with many of the parliamentary reports that have had no response from the Government. Photo: Andrew Taylor

are taken seriously by the Government. Most have in fact been responded to, certainly not always within the very strict time limited that are required ... We take the task of responding to genuine parliamentary reports seriously."

However, today the *Herald* details how the Government has not even responded to inquiries that it has ordered - 27 of them in the

House of Representatives since December 1998. It is supposed to respond within three months but some of these inquiries date back six years. They include reports on the 2003 bushfires, crime, substance abuse and salinity.

The Opposition Leader, Kim Beazley, said: "There's a whole range of issues which from time to time have deeply concerned and

worried the Australian population and this Government has treated them all in the most cavalier fashion in its arrogance."

A coalition of community groups burnt by the inquiry process will form a watchdog group to monitor how the Federal Government responds. To be known as the Parliamentary Action Group, it will check whether it

replies within three months, as it promised in 1996. The groups met yesterday at the Ashfield Uniting Church, led by the Reverend Bill Crews of the Exodus Foundation.

But the Health Minister, Tony Abbott, said people who went to the trouble of giving evidence to committees should not think their efforts were in vain as many government policies "are subtly

moderated because of the kind of evidence that parliamentary committees take". A 2003 Senate inquiry had been taken into account in the Government's "strengthening Medicare" changes.

Go to smh.com.au for the full list of inquiries the Government ordered but has yet to respond to.

Council rates leave inflation for dead

Bonnie Malkin and Tim Dick

Ratepayers face big increases in council bills after the State Government allowed five councils to raise rates by about 9 per cent, more than double inflation.

At least another 25 councils want to increase their rates, including Leichhardt, which has requested 16 per cent.

The 8.6 per cent rise approved for Ku-ring-gai will partially fund a \$4 million project the Government thinks is too hard to do itself - harvesting storm water.

The Local Government Minister, Tony Kelly last week also approved rises in Pittwater, Hornsby, Blacktown and Dubbo. He still has

>> CAMPAIGN FOR SYDNEY

before him requests from Leichhardt, North Sydney (which wants a 7.2 per cent rise), Marrickville (7 per cent), Woollahra (13.3 per cent), Parramatta (9.8 per cent), Liverpool (10 per cent), Shoalhaven (6 per cent), Shellharbour (13 per cent), Ryde (6.8 per cent) and Manly (6.3 per cent).

Mr Kelly has turned down only three of the 49 rates applications he has received since 2003.

Residents in Ku-ring-gai will pay at least \$76 a year more than they did in 2003-04. Pittwater \$85 more, Hornsby \$62, Blacktown \$42 and Dubbo \$43. If Leichhardt gets its way residents there will be paying at least \$117 more.

The Government is allowing Ku-ring-gai to put residents' money into saving water by using storm water for 10 ovals and two public gardens. The Mayor of Ku-ring-gai, Adrienne Ryan, said there was a growing awareness

COLUMN 8 More - Page 16

Paul Hogan, of Manly Vale, was looking at toys with his sons in Dee Why. "The packaging on a Chinese-made Batman and Robin action figure kit boldly proclaimed: 'Get ready To crumble obscure!'"

WEATHER Details - Page 14

- Sydney city Partly cloudy 12°-19°
Tomorrow cloudy 9°-16°
- Liverpool Fine, partly cloudy 5°-19°
Tomorrow cloudy 3°-16°
- Penrith Fine, partly cloudy 6°-19°
Tomorrow cloudy 4°-16°
- Newcastle Fine, sunny 9°-19°
Tomorrow showers 9°-16°
- Wollongong Cloudy periods 10°-18°
Tomorrow showers 8°-16°
- Canberra Showers 5°-11°
Tomorrow showers 4°-9°

ISSN 0312-6315



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Free at last, but a prisoner still of his tortured mind

Joseph Kerr

After seven years in detention, even good news is hard to hear. Australia's longest-held immigration prisoner, Peter Qasim, was told yesterday he would finally be freed.

Mr Qasim, who is in a psychiatric hospital suffering severe depression, gave a muted reaction to the Government's offer of a bridging visa.

"He was happy, very relieved to be finally close to freedom," said his lawyer, Alexis Goodstone. "His mental situation is not very good so he didn't jump up and down and start screaming, but in his own way I think he is very excited."

Ms Goodstone, who works for the Public Interest Advocacy Centre, said his response was "a bit deadened" because he had been mentally shutting down his emotions.

Following last week's vow by the Prime Minister, John



Seven years lost in detention ... Peter Qasim.

Howard, to soften the Government's hard line on mandatory detention, the Immigration Minister, Amanda Vanstone, announced yesterday Mr Qasim would be one of 50 people locked up for more than two years to be offered bridging visas.

Mr Qasim was moved out of Baxter Detention Centre this month to a psychiatric hospital in Adelaide to treat his depression.

For years, the Government had refused to accept Mr Qasim's claims that he was from Indian Kashmir and as recently as March claimed that he was not co-operating with immigration officials. Senator

Vanstone said the Indian Government had not been prepared to take him either.

She said he was being released because he was finally being co-operative, although mystery still surrounded his identity.

"There's been a change in his co-operation," she said. "It wasn't, unfortunately, something that resulted in us being able to successfully identify [him] ... I can't say to you that Mr Qasim has provided us with sufficient information to say who he is. I think we can conclude that he either cannot or will not do so."

Mr Qasim could be released within three days, with an Adelaide family ready to take him in as he recuperates.

The businessman Dick Smith, an advocate for Mr Qasim's freedom, said there was even the prospect of a job on a vineyard. Another of his supporters, Greg Egan, said it could be months

INSIDE

\$400,000 kiss and tell



Freed hostage Douglas Wood has sold the story of his 47-day ordeal in Iraq to the Ten Network, for a reported \$400,000. The lawyer hired to manage his media affairs said Ten would give Mr Wood "control over the whole process" and "substantial" time to tell his story. **Page 2**

More than a match

Yes, it was just a one-day game. But at last it was cricket that meant something, the most tense game since the 1999 World Cup. And it left England's fresh, strong young men - who showed rare toughness and intimidation - believing they can win the Ashes. **Page 34**

Infertile? Try stem cell sex

Deborah Smith
Science Editor

Being gay, infertile or single may be no barrier in the future to having children, as scientists move closer to creating eggs and sperm artificially.

An Australian scientist, Orly Lacham-Kaplan, has converted embryonic stem cells - from male embryos - into eggs.

Although her research used mice, British scientists announced yesterday that they had converted embryonic human stem cells into the precursor cells that eventually become eggs and sperm.

The research raises many extraordinary possibilities. In theory, gay couples could have children genetically related to both of them, with one partner producing the egg and the other the sperm. Infertile or elderly women could create their own eggs in the laboratory. And single men could have children using their own sperm and egg.

Stephan Millett, the director of Curtin University's Centre for Applied Ethics and Philosophy, said stem cell research was overtaking the public's capacity

BREAKTHROUGHS

- In May South Korea produces 30 cloned human embryos and 11 sets of embryonic stem cells that match 11 patients with diabetes, spinal injuries and a genetic deficiency.
- The same day British scientists became the second to produce a cloned human embryo.
- Belgian scientists announced yesterday they were the first to produce a cloned human embryo from eggs matured in the lab.

to understand the science, and Australia's cautious approach was justified. "We're forging ahead into a territory with so many unknowns."

The British team's leader, Harry Moore, said the aim was to help infertile couples. "For some men and women this would be the only route for producing sperm and eggs." However, this goal was a long way off. "We would have to prove it was safe," he said.

Both studies were presented at the European Society for Human Reproduction and Embryology in Copenhagen. If either technique

was used to produce eggs and sperm genetically identical to the parent, it would involve therapeutic cloning, which is banned in Australia but allowed in Britain and the US.

The Australian ban is due to be reviewed by the end of the year. Dr Lacham-Kaplan, of Monash University, developed a simple technique in which stem cells from mice embryos were cultured with growth-promoting cells from testicles. After seven days ovarian structures containing eggs developed.

Dr Lacham-Kaplan said the eggs were at an early stage of development. "Further studies are required to explore whether they're normal and able to mature and participate in fertilisation."

The British team took stem cells from human embryos and grew them into sets of cells called embryoid bodies. A tiny proportion of the embryoid bodies cells had characteristics of cells that become sperm and eggs.

They said the research could improve understanding of how ovaries and testicles develop and might lead to a laboratory source of eggs for therapeutic cloning.

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The new E 200 Kompressor



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